



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Hepatitis E

What is hepatitis E?

Hepatitis (hep-ah-TY-tiss) E is an inflammation of the liver caused by the Hepatitis E virus, which is found in the stool of an infected person. Hepatitis E rarely causes long-term liver damage or death, but can cause very bad illness in pregnant women. Hepatitis E is rare in the United States and is almost always related to travel to a country where hepatitis E is common.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis E?

Symptoms usually begin about 40 days after exposure, but can begin after 15-60 days. Death from hepatitis E is rare, but it occurs in 10-30 percent of pregnant women in the 6th to 9th months of their pregnancy. People are most likely to spread the disease from about 2 weeks before symptoms begin until 2 weeks after. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Joint pain
- Dark urine
- Pale, clay-colored stool
- Loss of appetite
- Yellowing of skin and eyeballs (jaundice)

How is hepatitis E spread?

Hepatitis E virus is passed in stool, and people become sick by touching the stool of a person with the illness. Contaminated drinking water is the most common way to

get sick with hepatitis E. For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions.

Who is at risk for getting hepatitis E?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, older adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are most likely to get sick. People are at risk for hepatitis E infection if they:

- Drink or swallow untreated water.
- Eat food prepared by a person with the illness.
- Eat raw produce or raw shellfish (e.g., oysters).
- Travel to countries where hepatitis E is common and where there is little clean water or proper waste removal.
- Are exposed to the stool or blood of a person with the illness.

How do I know if I have hepatitis E?

A person having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours or having jaundice should see a doctor right away. The health care provider may take a blood sample to test for hepatitis E.

How is hepatitis E treated?

There is no treatment for hepatitis E other than treating symptoms. People who have had hepatitis E get lifelong immunity and cannot get it again. There is no vaccine to stop the illness from happening.

How is hepatitis E prevented?

Usually, hepatitis E can be prevented by closely following the guidelines below:

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom, after swimming, and before, during, and after food preparation.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.
- Do not change diapers near recreational water.
- When traveling outside the United States, drink bottled drinks, do not eat uncooked produce unless you peel them yourself, do not eat foods or drinks from street vendors, and do not drink or eat local water or ice.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/E/index.htm>

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

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